

RIGHT - Senior Airman Paul Schultz, left, 33rd Rescue Squadron, and Tech. Sgt. Mura Kawa, Naha Air Rescue Squadron, carry a "survivor" on a stretcher during a mass casualty exercise.

ON THE COVER - Pararescuemen from the Kadena's 33rd Rescue Squadron and the Japan Air Self Defense Force load a simulated victim onto a JASDF CH-47 helicopter during a Cope Angel mass casualty exercise July 12.



Photos by Staff Sgt. Pete Saldana



Tech. Sgt. "Footman" Okuda, Naha Air Rescue Squadron, left, and Senior Airman Tony Allick, 33rd Rescue Squadron, help treat an injured "survivor."



Naha Air Rescue Squadron pararescuemen haul equipment from a CH-47 helicopter during Cope Angel '99.



Staff Sgt. Benjamin Harris, 33rd Rescue Squadron, uses a radio while other pararescuemen work in the background.

Teamwork, combining assets key exercise concept

By Staff Sgt. Orville Desjarlais
Kadena Shogun editor

Night training exercises between Kadena's 33rd Rescue Squadron and Japan Self Defense Force rescue units were the new twist

added to the ever-increasing complexity of Cope Angel 99, an annual peacetime search-and-rescue exercise held July 12-16. The exercise took place on a small island off Okinawa.

Exercise events included water recovery operations and both day

and night mass casualty exercise, the latter done with the help of night vision goggles.

Main objective

The main objective of Cope Angel is to demonstrate and practice interoperability between U.S. and JASDF search-and-rescue forces.

Participants included the 33rd RS with its HH-60G helicopters, the Naha Air Rescue Squadron and its U-125A aircraft and V-107A helicopters, the Naha Helicopter Lift Squadron with a CH-47 helicopter and the Nyutabaru Air Rescue Squadron with a UH-60J helicopter.

"We want to break down barriers of combined operations so that the 33rd RS and JASDF SAR forces can work together more frequently in the future," said Capt. Rich Jacobs, 33rd RS pilot and exercise project officer.

Those barriers included language, procedures and equipment.

During the first day of the exercise, rescue units practiced plucking "victims" from the East China Sea using the JASDF's U-125A as the airborne mission command platform for the first time.

Locating the victims

"They located the survivors and vectored in the rest of the rescue helicopters," said Staff Sgt. Brian Tharp, 33rd RS pararescueman. The 33rd RS and JASDF pararescuemen, known as PJs, intermixed their teams so that one U.S. PJ was on a JASDF helicopter and vice versa.

"We use different hand signals in the water, so we had to review them before the exercise," Tharp pointed out.

The second day included a mass casualty exercise in which the rescue squadrons practiced saving victims after a simulated aircraft accident on a small island off Okinawa.

"There was a language barrier," Tharp said. "But with their medical skills and our medical skills, we pretty much knew what the injuries were by pointing at the wounds and using hand signals. It was difficult to communicate, but I really learned a lot and it was a great opportunity to increase my medical skills."

Teamwork on land, too

On July 14, the first-ever combined night mass casualty exercise was held on the same island.

"Since we had night-vision goggles and they didn't, we landed first," explained Jacobs. "Our PJs set up the landing zone and casualty collection point. JASDF then provided most of the manpower with three helicopters and all their PJs to do the mission. It worked out very well."

But it wasn't just over the water that the rescue units displayed cooperation. Two-person teams composed of a 33rd RS member and a Naha Air Rescue Squadron member were positioned at the 33rd RS operations desk, acting as a liaison for all information, inputs and requests.

On Thursday they again practiced open-water recovery operations, then Friday the JASDF hosted a post-exercise barbecue in Naha.

Best training to date

"The training was some of the best so far because we increased it's scope," Jacobs said. "We've expanded what we've been doing over the past couple years."

"If anything were to happen in the future, we want procedures we can actually use with JASDF so that we can officially work together."

"The whole concept of this training was based on combining our assets. In real life, if something would happen, I think we'd operate smoothly together," said Tharp.

Photos by Staff Sgt. Pete Saldana
Staff Sgt. Brian Tharp, left, and Senior Airman Paul Schultz, both in the 33rd Rescue Squadron, apply traction to a "broken leg" during Cope Angel training.